The Old Apple Tree's Easter

W·H·H·MURRAY

"Tis not too Late to Seek a Newer World"

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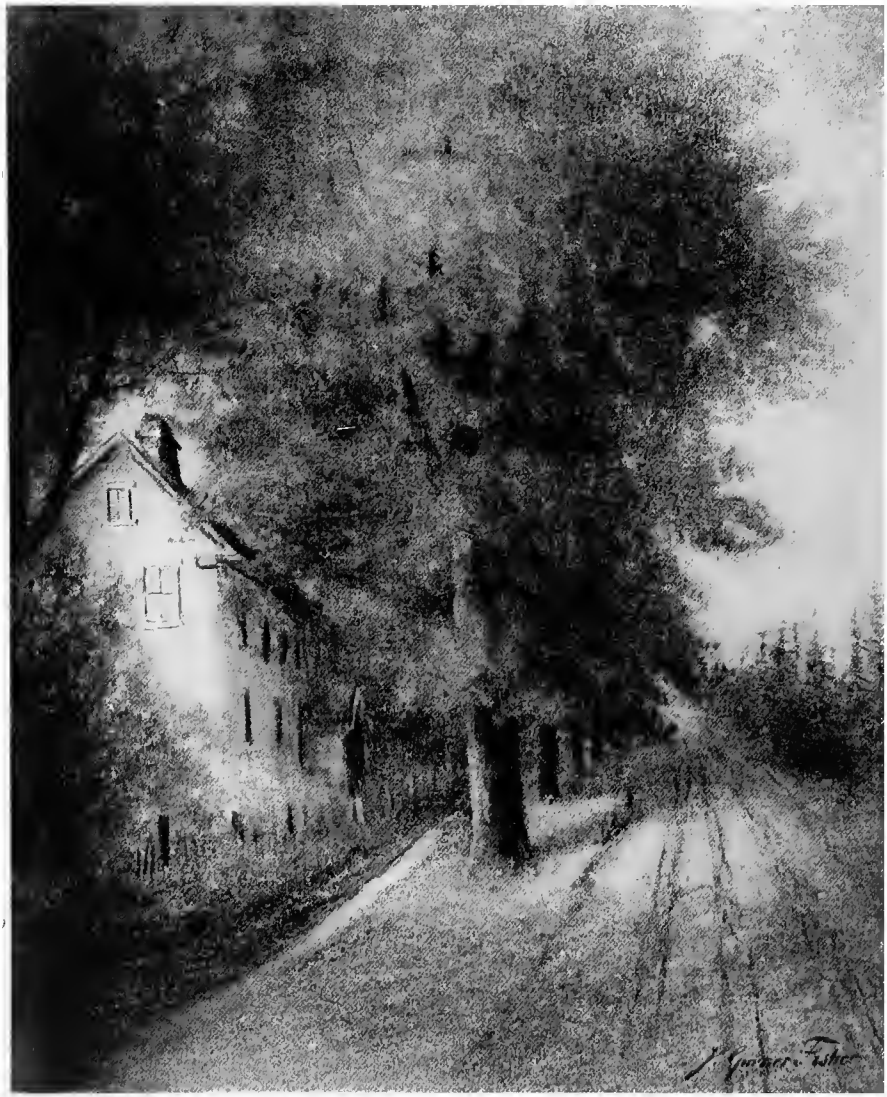

I HAD COME BACK TO THE OLD HOME.

Complete Works

OF

W. H. H. Murray.

National Edition,

VOL. VII.

The Old Apple Tree's Easter

OR

A Tale of Nature's Resurrection.

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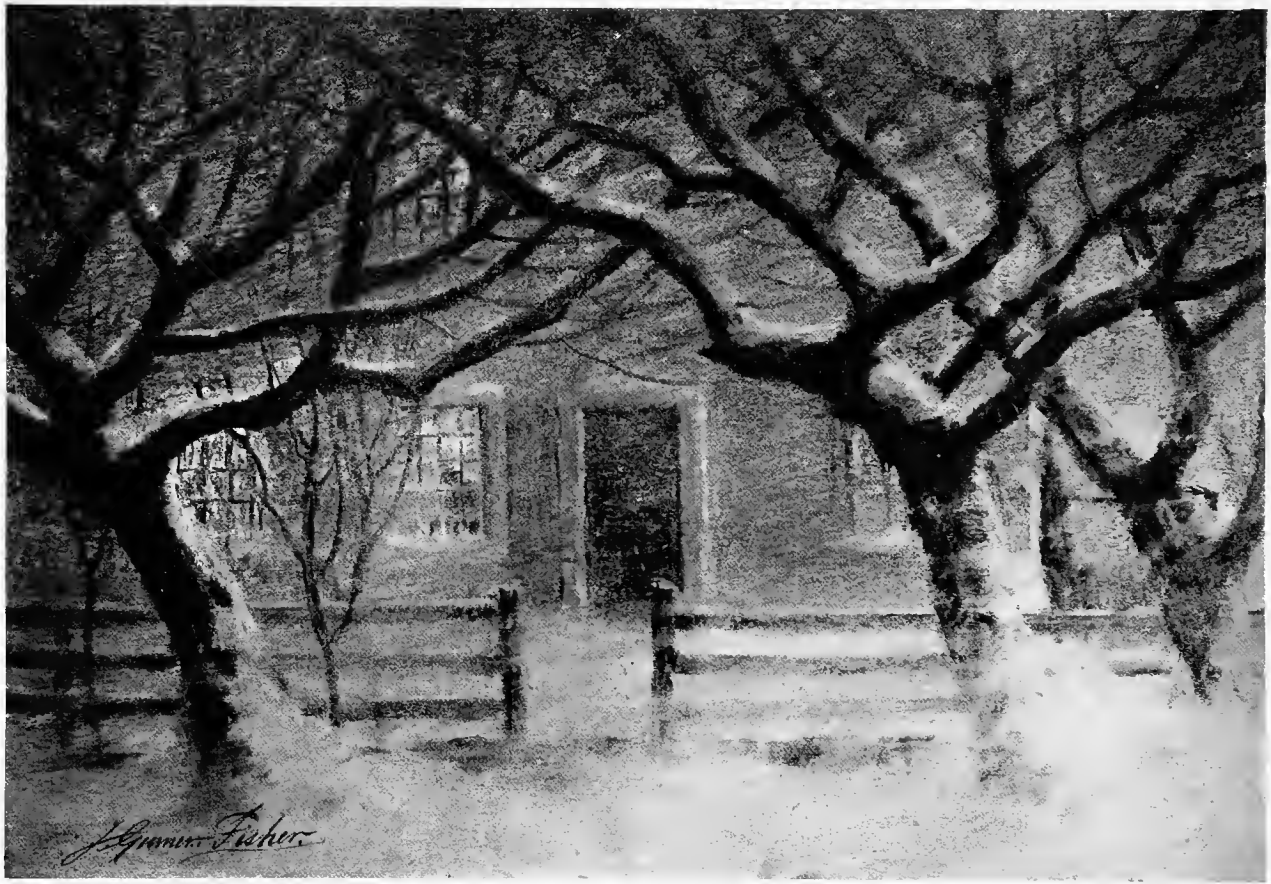
THE OLD APPLE TREE'S EASTER.

FTER years of absence I had come back to the old home and once more lighted the fire in the huge fireplace, and through the long winter evenings and long into the nights of cold starlight and colder storm had piled it high with logs

full of sap and gums that make heat and flame, and enjoyed the crackle and roar of it with the zest of a boy and the mood of a man ripened by years and thought to sense the genuine comfort of real and homely things. And the old fireplace had told me many tales—tales of the old-time folk that were before me, and of whose blood I am; memorial tales of their loves and hates, joys and griefs, life and death; of their tears and laughter, their wit and humor, their merry-making and frolics, their jokes and fun—all of which it had seen and



COLD WITH A COLDNESS THAT SELDOM COMES TO OUR CONNECTICUT COAST.

heard, helped and shared. And I had written them all down as things pleasant and precious to me and mine, and the written pages, filled with old-time folklore, lay on the table by my side, a record and memorial of those that had been and were not, whom I had never seen, and yet knew; for out of them all had I not come? and were they not all, wise and foolish, weak and strong, wicked and good, living again in me?

It was a night cold with a coldness which seldom comes to us of the Connecticut coast, a coldness

"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

ST. PAUL.

that pierced through wood and penetrated stone as a double-edged knife enters the flesh when murder drives it through fibre and bone. The covering of the old house cracked, and the pond roared and thundered as the horrible cold pried great seams and fissures through the thick blue ice that burdened its level water. It was a glacial night, and he who opened door thrust his face into the centre of a glacier.

There was a log in the shed close by the door of the room in which I sat—the trunk of an old-

SAPLESS AS A MONUMENT.

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

JESUS.

time apple tree, ringed with twice a hundred years of growth, solid as ebony and heavy as stone. Even as a boy I remember it as a mighty trunk, seasoned on its own root, sapless as a monument, barkless and shiny as a pillar of bone. The hardest woods of the world have I cut, but never a harder. A six-pound axe, tempered to perfection and swung with the full length and strength of me, started so small a chip that I marveled, and as I looked at the edge of the axe and then at the laughingly small proof of the

blow, I said, "Am I myself, or has some little fellow who never swung head of heft and edge of steel got inside my jacket this morning?"

This mighty log I ended up, straining at the task with all my strength, edged it through the door, rolled it on to the hearthstone, and pried it up with a sturdy sapling of hill growth—my huge hickory poker —one end at a time upon the strong irons. The old fireplace opened its mouth wide and roared its welcome as it felt its weight, and the seasoned wood at the touch of living brands

"Lazarus, Come forth!"

JESUS.

burst into a mighty sheet of pure, sparkless yellow flame.

"The old fireplace has been telling you tales, I hear," said the log; "tales of the ancient folk and years long gone. And it is fit it should, for men fail fast and women fade like flowers, and the young in the whirl of happy life hear little or forget. But the living should remember that the dead lived once and live still, and hate to be forgotten. For to the loving heart and the large mind, oblivion is bitter as wormwood to the mouth of a babe, who screams

"And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes."

GOSPEL NARRATIVE.

at the taste; while the hope of remembrance is sweet as fruit to child, or flower to bee.

"But I can tell you tales of the old folk, too, and of those older than they, for I saw the white come in and the red go out; and of myself will I tell you first, for only so will you learn of them and their ways. So listen while I tell you the things that have been and will be.

"I sprang from a seed that was grown over sea, and a little girl, fair even as yours, whom you love as blood loveth blood like itself, only

I SPRANG FROM A SEED THAT GREW OVER SEA.

purer and stronger, brought it hither. A big Kentish farmer gave one to the sweet little lass as she stood on the wharf holding tightly to her father's strong hand, saying, 'Take this little seed and plant it on your father's farm nigh the house he will build, that the new England may remember the old.' He was a huge strong man, with gray eyes and big shaggy eyebrows, and a vast yellow beard; and as he placed the seed that was mother to me, in the little girl's hand, he lifted her up in his mighty arms and kissed her red cheek with

"As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

ST. PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS.

tears in his eyes. Grace Norton was her name; and she it was that, first of all maidens, was married in Guilford town, whither her father, Thomas Norton, came, and whose warm, brown marshes, with the strong healthy salt smell at the roots of their growth, run down in amber and gold to the beaches and the sea.

"One warm spring morning, when the wonder of growing leaves, and of soft green colors was on the great woods, Grace Norton took me forth in her little plump hand for the planting. With her walked a child

"If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised."

ST. PAUL.

of the old red race, lithe as a willow slip, with hair and eyes like the night, and skin of the color of old wine when the sun shines through it. The two digged with a stick in the mellow soil and covered the seed with warm earth, and with their little hands scattered leaves over the spot, and rolled stones around it in a ring to mark the planting.

"And when their task was done and they looked around, lo! they beheld a woman of the old race standing nigh, looking steadfastly at them, as the old look at the young

with thoughts that go backward and go onward both. She was old and wise, the prophetess of the tribe—a witch, the newcomers called her; for she knew the virtue of herbs, the potency of roots, of bloodroot, of crane's-bill, of sassafras, of spikenard; and, above all, she had the seeing eye and foresaw the future, and knew the issue of things from their beginning. She it was who stood by, leaning on her staff of ghost wood, and she said:

"'You have planted a seed, little ones, that grew over sea. The white

"O death, where is thy sting?
O grave, where is thy victory?"

ST. PAUL.

and the red have planted it, and the forces of sunrise and sunset shall foster its growth.'

"And then she waved her staff above the fresh mold that covered the seed, and chanted a chant. 'Thou shalt live. Thou shalt grow. Flower and fruit shall be thine. Birds shall nest in thy branches, lay eggs and hatch young. No snake shall disturb them in their nesting, neither hawk nor owl shall vex them. Thou shalt live long and feed many. I, of many years, of the seeing eye, the witch of Totoket, have said it!'

WHO HAST MADE TREES THY COMRADES, AND THY HOME IN FORESTS.

"So was the seed, brought from over sea that was the beginning of me, planted by little Grace Norton. It was a true seed, and well sown, as the issue proved. For the sun shone, the rains fell, and the Spirit of Life quickened the seed, the germ within became vital and I was! Oh, thou of years and of knowledge, who hast seen and felt and thought much; thou dweller in cities, thou ranger of woods, whose head is as white as my ashes will be; dost thou know, canst thou tell more than I of life in its

beginning, whether it be of plant or beast or human?"

And I, after silence and much pondering, said:

"Old log, I know no more than thou of life in its beginning."

"Thou hast well said," answered the log. "Thou hast come at least to one certainty. One fact, therefore, hast thou mastered. Master one other and thou shalt be wise as those who by wisdom are ready for death. Five times thy years have I lived. Do years count? Does their coming bring aught, or their going

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

ST. PAUL.

add aught to what is more precious than rubies? It may be. When I am not, ask my ashes whither I am, what I am, and what death brought to me."

For a space there was silence. Suddenly the cypress platform that ran around the old house cracked like a pistol shot. An unlocked shutter, high up in the gable, slammed against the sash, while an icy blast struck the northern side of the old house so fierce a blow, that the shingles shivered and the tenants of the oaken

"Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept."

ST. PAUL.

posts creaked in their age-seasoned mortises.

These noises I heard as one hears without hearing, for all my mind was centered on what the log had been saying. But no light came to my darkness, and I said:

"Years do, indeed, bring much in their coming and leave much at their going, to him who loves learning, and five times my years should mean much; but, what death can bring of good or of ill to a log is beyond knowing."

"Wait! Let me tell you of my

life," said the log, "for life interprets death, and translates the mystery of a hieroglyph to the vernacular of sequence. Forever and forever we shall be as we are, nor shall change come to us, save the change or the changes that are natural to growth. Life is splendor. The position that defines it is meridian. Declension is loss, ascension is gain. As a starting point, death and birth are one. What is sunset to one hemisphere is sunrise to another. From two points of view come two interpretations; but the splendor is the same. From

"And Enoch walked with God
and he was not, for God took him."

GENESIS.

the standpoint of ignorance, death is sunset. From the standpoint of knowledge, it is sunrise.

"How well I remember my first blooming! I had not known until then what I was. How strangely I felt! I did not know what it meant—the sweet forces moving in trunk and bough and twig. And when my buds began to form and swell, I was half frightened. But after a little space, through all my fibres there ran a sweet prophetic sense, that I, who had been but wood, was about to become fruit!

"Oh, thou man of whitened head, thou who hast made trees thy comrades and thy home in forests, who knowest each leaf and bloom of tree and shrub as lover knows face and form of his beloved, thou knowest that it was the spirit of all blessed life and growth that was moving within me; that I was as a city captured and taken by the benign, prolific parental energy that makes all worlds beautiful with a beauty that repeats itself through God, in deathless round and course for ever and ever. And when, after

WHEN THE SUN CAME UP THROUGH ODOROUS MIST.

a night of tremulous expectancy, the warm sun came up through odorous mist that lay a vast perfume on field and wood, and suddenly shone full upon me and every swelling bud on every twig of me burst into white and pink expression, and made me lovely above all trees and sweet with a delicate fragrance beyond all words —thou knowest—thou knowest!"

Here silence—silence deep and sweet—filled room and me with its sweet sense of joy unutterable; for was I not standing at that white line which marks with fadeless light the

"I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there may ye be also."

JESUS.

birth of things and of those maternal forces that clothe the fields with verdure, the hills with pride, the earth with men, and heaven with the spirits of men made perfect? And through the silence, and as the sweetest part of it, as purest note of flute or flute-like voice, breathed into stillness as fit soul into fittest body, the old-time statement, old and holy:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

"Then did I know myself," continued the log; "know for what I was created. That I was made to

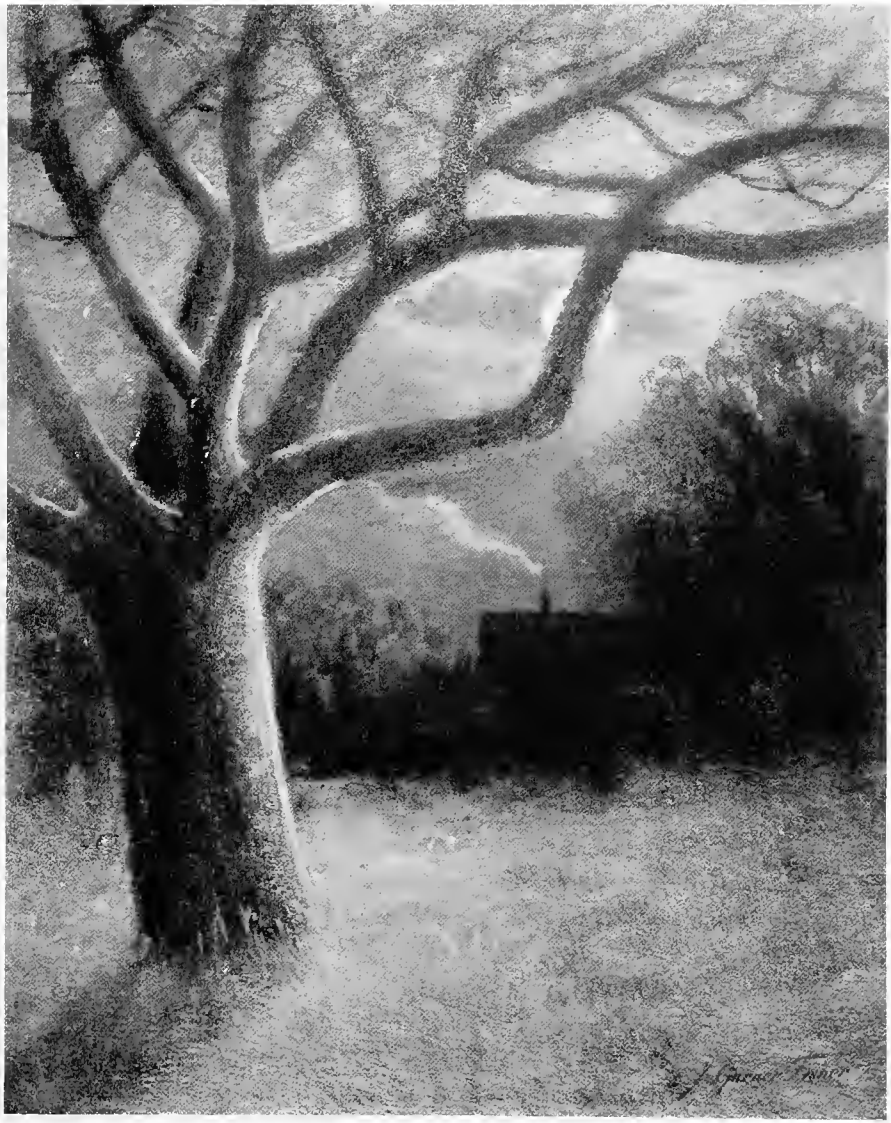
beautify, sweeten and feed the world, and that I was the expression of forces that are deathless, because needed, and should move on forever in the course and order of endless things. From that hour I welcomed birds to my branches and bees to my blossoms, and all panting things in the hot summer days to my shade. The strong came and ate of my fruit and were made stronger. Children feasted and thrived on the mellow globes that fell from my branches. The weak and the sick ate of me and were refreshed and

"For everything that exists is, in a manner, the seed of that which will be."

MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS.

strengthened, and the juices of my fruit, pungent and richly flavored, crowned the feasts of your ancestors with gladness and cheer.

"For two hundred years I fed and feasted the men and women of your name and blood, and the stranger within their gates, and the hungry wanderer that passed me by, ate of my life and fared on rejoicing. Not a year did I fail them—not a season was I barren. I was so happy to serve. I was so glad to be of use. It was a joy to feel that I was a component part of a wise



NOT A YEAR DID I FAIL THEM — NOT A SEASON WAS I BARREN.

order—a unit in the long column of benevolent forces, whose total sums up the worth of nature and the goodness of nature's God."

"Alas! alas! old tree!" I cried. "Alas! that thou art dead! That never again will thy blossoms beautify the garden or thy fruit feed mankind! And to think that I, who owe so much to thee, should have felled thee to the earth and haled thee to these fatal flames! Alas! that my hand, even mine, should have lighted thy funeral fire and brought thee so quickly to thy end! For even now

"'Tis not too late to seek a newer world."

THE GREEK.

thy solidness trembles to crumbling, and in a few moments there will of thee be nothing left, save a bed of embers and, after a little, a trace of whitened ash, which the mighty draught of the roaring chimney above thee will whirl upward into the icy gale."

"Say not so!" exclaimed the log. "Thou art my friend in need, and hence God's angel. I was dead solidity; I am becoming a living force. I was a lifeless body; I am becoming a formative puissance. I had come to the end of a benevolent

A LITTLE TRACE OF WHITENED ASH—NO MORE.

course; I am now beginning a beneficent career. I was dead and in my grave; you smote the pallid portals of my tomb and opened the gates of opportunity. When next the sun shall light the world, its beams will be my resurrection morn. The liberty of elements is henceforth mine. I shall mingle with the air. I shall descend into the mold. As a living force, I shall again invigorate roots. I shall once more become a vital sap. I shall feel bough and twig and leaf. I shall re-live my life of bud and bloom. I shall draw

from air and rain, from dew and warmth, and give to man anew, aye to thee and thine, the mystery and beauty of fruit. This is my Easter night, and you behold in me, as I consume, the proof and sign, the fact and force of nature's resurrection."

Was it the wind softened into music by the smooth molding of the cornice? For by the calendar of the church no Easter hymn might swell from organ pipe or voice for weeks to come. Yet music soft and pure as note of hermit thrush from misty

"I did that which was right, I hated evil, I gave bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, succour to him who was in need, therefore shall I live."

EGYPTIAN EPITAPH.

swamp at early dawn was in the room.

I took the Book and turned the leaves, and saw the blessed words as prisoned men see stars:

"*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*"

Then bowed I down my head and held communion with all that I had loved and lost. With noble women, manly men and children fair and sweet; with withered leaves and faded flowers, with broken rings and

Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the spirit forever.

Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the house of it seems.

BHAGAVUD GITÂ.

farewells at the edge of graves, and scenes and things that once made life for me, but which would be for me no more; and with that perfect one, the guiding spirit of my life, whose face looks out of cloud and sky and trees at me, but whom, though seeking evermore, I nevermore can find. And when I rose and turned, the blaze had died, the brands were brown, and on the hearthstone broad there lay a little heap of whitened ash. No more?

The wise neither grieve for the dead nor the living. I myself never was not, nor thou, nor all the princes of the earth: nor shall we ever hereafter cease to be.

CELESTIAL SONG OF THE HINDOOS.

"AN HOLY CULT OF HOLY TREES."

IT is known that tree-worship existed among all the European branches of the Aryan stock. Oak worship obtained among the Druids. With the ancient Germans, sacred groves were common; and among their descendants, tree-worship is hardly extinct, even to-day. Among the old Prussians, were sacred oaks constantly attended by a hierarchy of priests, who never suffered the fire to go out in the sacred grove. At Upsala, the old religious

capital of Sweden, there was a sacred grove, every tree in which was regarded as holy.

Tree-worship abounded as a cult in Greece and Italy. In the Forum, stood the sacred fig-tree of Romulus; and if, at any time, it showed signs of distress, consternation spread through the city. On the Palatine stood a carnel tree. It was regarded as very sacred. Plutarch speaks of it and the superstition regarding it, and says: "Whenever this tree appeared to any passer-by as drooping, he set up a hue and cry, which was echoed by the people in the streets, and soon a crowd might be seen running from all sides with buckets of water, as if they were hastening to put out a fire."

Among all the old-time folk, trees were regarded as being animate and having souls, even as their own. How or when this faith arose is beyond interrogation; but, that it existed and was practically world-wide is undeniable. In Eastern Africa, to destroy a cocoanut tree is the same as to commit matricide. In Siam, the holy men will not even break the branch of a tree, because it would be as wicked as to break the arm of an innocent person. Buddhism borrowed its reverence for trees from precedent peoples. The Dyaks believe trees have souls, and will not cut one down. In India, sex has been immemorially ascribed to trees, and they are formally married to each other with holy rites. On Christmas Eve, German peasants used to tie fruit-trees together with ropes of

straw to make them bear fruit, saying that the trees must be married to be fruitful.

In the Malaccas, when the clove-trees blossom they are treated as pregnant women. No one is allowed to make a sudden noise near them. No one must approach them unless he uncovers his head. In Java, the same ideas prevail.

All over the world, the belief that trees are capable of feeling pain has always abounded among aboriginal peoples. The red men of our continent held to this faith strongly. A prophet of the Sioux said to me once: "Have you never heard the shriek of a tree when it fell? Have you never heard it groan when it began to quiver and sway?"

Among the Blackfeet, the old men told me that trees had spirits even as themselves, and suffered as a man who is being brutally killed under the axe. In Austria, the peasants will not allow you to cut the bark of a tree with your knife or scratch it with a pin, because it gives it pain. When a tree has to be destroyed, they cut it down!

Many ancient peoples believed that the souls of the dead lived incorporate in the trees. In the Philippine Islands, this faith abounds. The islanders believe that the spirits of their ancestors inhabit the trees, and that it would be a heinous crime to cut one down. If they ever have to fell one, they first formally ask the tree's forgiveness,

and then tell it that the priests have commanded them to do it.

Among certain tribes who do practice the cutting down of trees, it is never done, in the case of any tree, until the chopper has gone in advance and warned the spirit within to seek a new abode. When land has to be cleared, a goodly number of trees is left, so that the spirits in the woods should have homes, and not desert the country.

In Sumatra, when a tree is felled, a young tree is planted at its root, in order that the spirit in losing its old home might have a new one. In some cases, they leave money and oil at the root of the tree, to compensate the disturbed spirit for what it has suffered.

"On either side of the river was the Tree of life, which bare twelve fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

APOCALYPSE.

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For information regarding any of Mr. Murray's works, address the author, personally, Guilford, Conn.